



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

OCTOBER 12, 2021, MEETING NOTES

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Arrived Late – 6:48pm</i>
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present – Left at 7:03pm and returned back at 7:45 PM.</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm and adjourned at 8:43 pm.

PUBLIC MEETING: 495 Columbia Street

Member Arbaugh recused himself.

The applicant team presented their façade design updates to their project, which had already received a formal UDC recommendation for their design in May. The building went through massing changes to reflect negotiations made with abutters. The approved façade design remained the same with minor changes made to the façade to reflect changes made due to the negotiations. There were also minor changes made to the landscaping, but the overall landscaping remained the same.

The Commission and applicant team discussed how it seems like a whole new building due to the changes, the updated massing, the updated corner and penthouse treatment, possible streetscape improvements, how the updates do not feel very architectural, and how the building may benefit from pushing the corner back from the edge of the lot to create an opening into the Boynton Yards neighborhood.

The Commission discussed if they had purview to ask the applicant team to continue their design review even though they are following the zoning requirements, considering they have essentially come back with a whole new building to review. Co-Chair Lewis reminded the Commission that this review was mostly just a curiosity to show the UDC the updates and changes made to the design, as the project had already been approved. The Commission was concerned that what they approved had been completely changed, including the public realm portion of the design. The Commission would like the façade on Webster Street, as well as the penthouse design to continue to be developed further. They would also like the width of the sidewalk to be expanded to 18' and more detail into how the proposed bike lane along Columbia east will start and end.

The applicant team explained the process they have been through and zoning amendments were needed to be approved by the City Council, which led to necessary design changes. Co-Chair Lewis agreed with the applicant team that the process has been lengthy and irregular for a development team.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted (2-1), with Member Talun opposing, that the project design updates have met the previous UDC recommended façade.

Following a motion by Member Valdes, seconded by Member Talun, the Commission unanimously (3-0) to incorporate additional design guidance.

RESULT:

APPROVED

Member Arbaugh rejoined the meeting.
Member Valdes recused himself for a personal matter at 7:03pm
Member Valdes rejoined the meeting at 7:45pm.

PUBLIC MEETING: 231-249 Elm Street & 6-8 & 12 Grove Street

The applicant team provided the site's urban context, as well as their general approach for design options centered on a pedestrian friendly ground-story with brick materiality for the building to be consistent with the character of Davis Square. They presented their sustainability goals, parking plan, site plan, three façade options, as well as landscape plans including the roof deck.

The Commission and applicant team discussed the scale and monotony of the design of the ground story, the width and materiality of the proposed sidewalks, the overall scale of the building, the loading and parking access, the penthouse, and the façade options. The Commission asked to see more reference of the urban context on Elm Street with adjacent buildings.

Following a motion by Member Fennick, seconded by Member Arbaugh and Member Talun, the Commission unanimously (4-0) to continue the design review and for the team to further explore façade option 1 with the "slot" design and window division of option 3, more detail of streetscapes on Elm Street and Grove Street, and additional information of storefronts within the urban context of Davis Square.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

PUBLIC MEETING: 15 Elm Street

The applicant presented the existing site conditions, as well as three façade designs. The applicant skimmed over the interior plans and the zoning chart.

The Commission asked to see a comparison of what the building currently looks like and what is being proposed. The Commission asked Staff about parking requirements and ADA requirements considering this is an existing building, as opposed to new construction. Staff noted that they would need to check the zoning ordinance to confirm this project is in compliance.

The Commission felt the design needed refinement, as they were having a difficult time understanding the design. The Commission and applicant discussed the possibility of adding larger windows, adding Juliette balconies on the upper floors, and how the existing storefront seems out of place.

The Commission would like to see a more comprehensive submission as the one submitted was not complete, with the addition of more detail and exploration into the building entrances, as well as a more detailed site plan. The Commission asked that the exhaust be moved from Porter Street to inside the building and requested a landscape plan.

Following a motion by Member Talun, seconded by Member Arbaugh, the Commission unanimously (3-0) to continue the design review to the next regularly scheduled meeting.

RESULT:

CONTINUED

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.